

## Resources:

1. Listen, Protect and Connect:  
[http://www.ready.gov/kids/downloads/PFA\\_Parents.pdf](http://www.ready.gov/kids/downloads/PFA_Parents.pdf)
2. The National Center for Child Traumatic Stress:  
<http://www.nctsnet.org>
3. National Mental Health Center:  
<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/topics/explore/disaster/>
4. American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry:  
<http://www.aacap.org/cs/DisasterTrauma.ResourceCenter>



Brochure design by  
Carla Pereira, M.A.  
Anja Luthi, M.A.  
Tona McGuire, Ph.D.  
The Pediatric Mental Health Task Force  
of the King County Healthcare Coalition



Development of these materials paid for by  
NWHRN member contributions. © 2015,  
Northwest Healthcare Response Network.  
Copying and adaptations permitted for non-  
commercial, educational use only.

# In a Disaster: What parents can do to help their children

---



Disasters and their aftermath can overwhelm a child's typical coping strategies and may cause changes in behavior, ability to learn, mental health, and physical development. There will not be enough mental health professionals to respond to all children in need. Parents and other family members must be prepared to help children to recover. Just as you provide medical first aid, you can provide psychological first aid to help your child with their emotional response to an overwhelming situation.

### **Basics: Psychological First Aid**

- 1) Stay calm. How you cope and behave influences how your child copes and behaves.
- 2) Provide basic needs of shelter, food, warmth and medical care.
- 3) Provide a sense of safety with access to family or familiar adults.
- 4) Assess what your child has seen and heard, but do not probe.
- 5) Provide accurate simple information about events and plans.
- 6) Problem-solve. What do you and your child need immediately? How can your child help?

## **After A Disaster: How Children May Respond**

### **Ages 1-5**

- Bed wetting, thumb sucking, clinginess
- Fears of the dark
- Stomachaches
- Nausea
- Sleep difficulties
- Anxiety, irritability, angry outbursts, sadness, withdrawal

### **Ages 6-11**

- Decline in school performance
- Aggressiveness, hyperactivity
- Developmental regression
- Changes in appetite
- Headaches
- Stomachaches
- Sleep difficulties
- School avoidance
- Withdrawal from friends
- Obsessive preoccupations with disaster or safety



### **Ages 12-18**

- Decline in academic performance
- Rebellion at home/school
- Irresponsible behavior
- Agitation
- Decreased energy levels
- Delinquent behavior
- Social withdrawal
- Substance abuse
- Appetite changes
- Headaches
- Stomachaches
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Sleep disorders
- Sadness/depression
- Feelings of inadequacy/helplessness

### **Some children will need further evaluation and professional help.**

Children who have seen or experienced loss of family, friends, pets or their home are more at risk to develop emotional difficulties, requiring professional evaluation or treatment. Seek help when worries or changes in behavior:

- affect ability to function
- affect relationships with family, friends or schoolwork AND
- have not significantly improved after 2- 3 months